

29 January 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR: Deputy Chief, Intelligence Information Staff

SUBJECT: Priority National Intelligence Objectives

I. Use of PNIOs in Intelligence Production and Collection

Everyone recognizes the need for a statement of objectives in the conduct of any kind of activity. Intelligence is no exception. Insofar as the PNIOs provide agreement in collating and summarizing the views and interpretations of the major tasks of intelligence, they are useful and have a bearing upon the direction of both the production and collection efforts. Major problems arise when attempts are made to cast the PNIOs into a direct role of influencing intelligence production and collection. We could all recount the fruitless effort that has gone into relating research programs, projects, or requirements to specific PNIOs in order to give some validity to our work or approval of the collection project being considered. We would be in a far stronger position if we all agreed to use the PNIOs as a general statement guiding our efforts rather than having to specifically relate our efforts to a given PNIO.

PNIOs obviously have been used in collection planning. Supposedly, they provide broad background for clandestine collection priorities which are worked into the IPC lists. We have seen very few manifestations of their use outside of CIA/ID/P staffs, even at intermediate policy and supervisory levels in the services. Mention of the name to most field collectors is not very meaningful. There does not seem to be any utilization in overt collection planning since, with the possible exception of the FRIs, there is no vehicle for stating overt collection requirements similar in scope and purpose to the IPC. In short, the PNIOs seem to be an expression of the thinking on national intelligence objectives that goes on amongst a select group of senior officials; they find some use in planning clandestine collection, and practically none in overt collection except as these latter programs are directed by responsible officials whose awareness of national needs coincides with the PNIOs. It should

be noted that the implicit philosophy of PHIOs -- that objectives are stated, following which efforts are developed to achieve them -- is incompatible with the traditional DD/P approach that those tasks will be undertaken for which assets are in being. Thus the PHIOs, by ignoring the "realities" -- the existing potential -- invite disregard on the part of the collectors. The main use to which we have seen PHIOs put is a negative one -- that of excuses for not undertaking a collection effort.

We see the following uses for the PHIOs:

a. A record at a moment in time of the aspects of current intelligence problems which properly concern the highest government levels. The problems are already known; USIB, however, needs to record, for its own discipline and guidance, what facets all representatives agree are most troublesome. This finding will be shortly out of date, but by it there is renewal among Board members of the basis for understanding one another. In short, a matter of housekeeping.

b. A periodic statement of Headquarters' view for all field personnel to be guided by. This use is strictly conjecture; other vehicles for guidance also exist.

c. A yardstick by which new or bizarre ideas can receive respectability, as in the case of our request [redacted] for support on Soviet surveying activity, without undergoing a costly justification process.

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II. Evaluation of PHIOs

The statements in the PHIOs are necessarily very broad and comprehensive. In this form they serve a definite purpose. In this general form, however, they constitute potential interpretive traps. The IPC is a more specific expression of collection objectives whose relationship to the PHIO objectives is derived by the interpretation of a select group in the community. The format, presentation, and final decision on priority is made by the IPC Committee and its secretarial staff. Translation of the IPC into specific clandestine collection direction appears to be the sole responsibility of the covert collectors, whose major objective is to relate priorities to capabilities and serve each overseas station with a mission compatible with case officer manpower and agent resources. Finally, it is the somewhat perplexing job of the Chief of Station to direct the day-to-day

operations of his staff in meeting the requirements of his mission directive as well as acting on ad hoc Washington requirements which may or may not be related to high priority objectives. There is a slow dissimilation of the intent of the PMIO through these processes of interpretation and translation that take place down through all the staff and command levels. In practical terms, this means that a very real possibility exists for the clandestine collection to be dissipated on activities that bear little or no relationship to high priority intelligence objectives. In short, the clandestine services are themselves determining their own priorities for collection instead of having these priorities and directives imposed on them from policy levels representing consumer offices. Overt collectors employ no such system to reach their policy and action decisions. In general, they are much more responsive to consumer needs, and if the consumers (producers) are geared to national objectives, inso facto, the overt collectors are closer to performing in recognition of these objectives.

It is doubtful that there is anything within the entire range of possible intelligence activities that could not, with cunning and erudition, be derived from or somehow related to the PMIOs. In fact, it is astounding how many diverse and seemingly insignificant items can be tied to the 1st Priority. The reasoning that an item of 10th order significance should be a 1st Priority, if a relationship to a 1st Priority Objective can be demonstrated, is patently false. It should be a 10th priority.

III. Recommendations for Improvement

The over-all PMIO should remain as it is, having been derived from the highest levels of decision and responsibility. The PMIOs should not be looked upon as a "bull cow", which it isn't. It is a USIB exercise for USIB's own benefit. On the other hand, if the PMIOs must assume an active and determinant role in influencing production and collection, then the processes by which this master list of objectives is broken down into specific production, collection, and action items should be drastically overhauled, as follows:

a. Each individual item in the master PMIO should receive elaboration and more precise definition. If the item is incapable of definition, it should receive no further consideration. The means whereby this could be accomplished are many; however, it should not be left to staffs, committees, or other self-perpetuating bodies. It might be assigned to selected representatives of line organizations.

b. Each objective, after elaboration, should be broken down into production and collection components. Each component thus derived should then be further broken down and assigned to an action office or offices. Each action office should then assume responsibility for periodic reporting on the status of the action assigned. If, for example, clandestine collection responsibility is assigned to HD/P in order to attain a portion of one of the PMIOs, that office should either accept or reject that responsibility, in whole or in part. In the case of rejection, they should be required to justify the rejection either in terms of capability or conflict with other priorities. If action responsibility is accepted, that office should be required to submit a periodic report. Steps should be taken to avoid the practice of accepting responsibility for action, just for the record, when in effect there is little if any intent to take the appropriate action.

Products from this breakdown of the basic PMIO would be:

a. PMIO Production Schedule -- production objective; priority; Agency and office of assignment, in whole or in part; time frame.

b. PMIO Collection Schedule -- collection objective; priority; Agency and office of assignment, in whole or in part; time frame.

1. IPC List for covert action.

2. IPO (0 for overt) List for overt action.

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Chief, Geographic Research

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